



July 3, 2019

The Honorable Cathy Giessel
Senate President
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Senate President Giessel and Speaker Edgmon:

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, whose membership consists of large public research universities and university systems in all 50 states, including the University of Alaska System and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, I write to strongly urge you to override the line-item veto that would exact massive cuts to Alaska's state universities. If enacted, these extraordinarily steep cuts would raise college costs on Alaskan students and their families, eliminate educational programs and the opportunities they provide, and ultimately place Alaska at an extreme competitive disadvantage in developing a strong, sustainable economy.

Throughout the nation, public universities are engines of upward mobility and incubators of innovation. They were founded with the mission of broadening access to life-changing higher education, pioneering innovations, and engaging communities to tackle their region's most urgent challenges. The proposed cuts to Alaska's public universities would severely damage their ability to deliver on that mission. Slashing investment in the state's public universities would dramatically increase the cost of education, leading Alaska's best and brightest to pursue higher education elsewhere or worse, not to seek higher education at all. But students attending out-of-state institutions don't just earn degrees there; they often build families, careers, and businesses there after graduating too.

Cuts to state investment also stand to jeopardize educational quality. Ultimately, the magnitude of cuts would require institutions to lay off faculty with years of experience teaching and conducting pathbreaking research. Literally, more than 1,000 faculty and staff working at University of Alaska System institutions would lose their jobs. Previous budget cuts have already led to the elimination of more than 50 degree and certificate programs as well as job losses of more than 1,200. Some academic programs would be closed and some campuses may need to be shuttered altogether. Students and communities would suffer as a result. More broadly, the state would suffer the short- and long-term economic consequences of having an inferior higher education system compared to those in other states.

Adding to this loss, recruiting top-flight faculty – a difficult task at any institution – would become exponentially more challenging. This would come at great cost not only to students, but also to the communities the University of Alaska serves. Typically, faculty at state universities conduct more than \$170 million in research annually, much of which is sponsored by the federal government and supports good-paying jobs in the state. University researchers at the University of Alaska are working to tackle some of society's most urgent problems in national security, in natural resource development, in the Arctic and in fisheries, just to name a few areas.

Given the crucial role public universities play in workforce and economic development, these cuts would inflict lasting damage to Alaska's economic competitiveness. The most innovative industries in the world locate near public universities and draw on the immense talent of their faculty and graduates. These cuts will not only harm those studying and working at these institutions. They will hamper the entire state's job growth and economic output.

Public universities must play a central role in meeting workforce needs. But they cannot do so without the backing of their states. This is exactly the approach envisioned in the Morrill Land-Grant Act, which provided substantial federal resources to states so they could jumpstart the development of public universities. More than a century and a half later, we now know that law turned higher education from a province of the privileged into a shared commitment to our future. With broad-based state and federal investment, it helped democratize access to higher education and build the most advanced and prosperous workforce the world has ever known.

As custodians of that cherished legacy, the legislature should jealously guard that remarkable achievement. This marvel is only possible when states invest in their own people. Please vote to override the veto imposed on the University of Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter McPherson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" and last name "McPherson" clearly distinguishable.

Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

cc: Members of the 31st Alaska State Legislature